



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

on toward a definite goal. Part of Nature is man, with his desires, hopes and abilities. Some men, and many women, are librarians, in whom these desires and hopes have definite aims and in whom the corre-

sponding abilities are more or less developed. We are all thus cogs in Nature's great scheme for community education; let us be intelligent cogs, and help the movement on instead of hindering it.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

BY JOHN JAY CHAPMAN, *New York City*

It is strange how seldom the chief end of education is mentioned. That end is happiness. Our theorists talk of fitting men for life—whereas it is life itself that is at stake. It would be a sad gift to fit men for such monotonous lives as most men have to live, except by giving them everything that their lives will not supply. Education is the antidote to environment, it is the spiritual life of the world, which men cannot find for themselves,—no not though they be great geniuses,—unless its language has been furnished to them in their early years. Very little is needed of the right sort of early learning to awaken the spirit and connect it with the whole of man's inheritance. It is amazing how restricted are the springs and sources of inspiration, how well thumbed are the few great books of the world. Lincoln found his language and his ideas in the Bible and in Shakespeare. If you subtract those two books from his boyhood you cannot have Lincoln. The roots of his thoughts, of his language, of his character and of his power are imbedded in this old literature, and the significance of his life is due to this,—its connection with past history. He is the outcome of world-thorough thinking and of world-cultivation. He transplants Europe to America, and continues on our soil the traditions of old philosophy.

The task of the educator is to bring the young and the great together. Now, curiously enough, the greatest works are just the ones which the young understand. It is only the great things that are both spontaneous and profound, and whose meaning leaps out fiercely enough to attract the

child. All the rest of literature implies education, thought and study. But these things explain themselves. They deal with the major passions, love, hate, fear, remorse, religious feeling, superstition; they expound our deepest instincts, truth, justice, retribution, the fatality of character,—all of which things are in a livelier state of activity in the child's mind than they are in the adult mind. And the great works of art are those which have exhibited these passions and these problems with such accuracy and power that they have become the very alphabet of the whole subject to our race, so that an acquaintance with them is, as it were, an acquaintance with the race itself.

Every European nation has always regarded its classics in this light. Small children in Ancient Greece learned the verses of Homer by heart. The mythology of Greece was adopted by Rome and comes down to us through the Middle Ages as a direct inheritance, never lost, seldom slighted, and always used in the teaching of children. When the Christian era came in, the Bible stories were the first thing given to the child and drove out the classics during a few centuries. On the other hand we have the mass of northern myth and fairy tale from Teutonic and Celtic sources,—all of which grew out of national sagas and stories composed originally for grown-up persons. It is to be noticed in this historic perspective that children's books have always been real books, and old books,—books which had passed through the mind of the world for centuries before they received the sanctifi-

cation of being used for childhood. The notion of special books for children is a very recent invention. We still follow the older practice; for almost all our books for children are mere adaptations out of ancient literatures, and settings of race legends. I doubt whether there is any great child's book which is not founded on the past, and digged out of earlier literature. The stories of Hans Anderson, the French fairy tales of Perrault, and Grimm's nursery tales are masterpieces of traditional literature and show the traces of influence as old as early Persia.

It is the same with our own Nursery Tales and Mother Goose Jingles. These odd little things have a secret charm and power that is due to their antiquity. They have each survived through some big literary quality. The modern substitutes and imitations of them which we see marketed by our new child theorists have no magic in them. They have a melancholy flatness, which must give the babies a sad view of humanity.

The good old children's books exhibit the whole craft of writing and the history of letters. They are little digests of powerful traditional art. On them the genius of human expression has been lavished during many centuries. I have recently been reading a burlesque about tales of adventure and desert islands. All the strong points and happy features of Robinson Crusoe are touched on, and many of Defoe's literary practices and the incidents used by him are described. The pamphlet was written by Lucian in Greek in the second century A. D. It goes to show the nature of human genius. Genius is very largely the power to summarize old devices and make use of inherited art.

I say then, avoid novelties in dealing with children. The gold you seek is before you. Here is the very web of literature and history; give a tassel or end of it to the child. If you don't, he'll have to go to college twenty years hence and listen to lectures about little Red Riding Hood. You may laugh; but this is the kind of thing

they give lectures on in most American universities today.

Before a child can speak, its mind should be full of the jargon of letters; and every good mother or nurse knows this, and sings and talks to the creature in an idiom which has been created, molded and formed to fit the child's intelligence by the wisdom of many generations. Before a child is able to read to itself, it should have heard many of the great myths and fables of the world, and should possess a strong hold on religious sentiment. Most mothers know this, and teach their children prayers and tell them stories according to the resources of their own education. The period before a child can read to itself is the critical period of its life. Now is the mind open and the heart capable. Now is the imagination receptive. The mythology and fiction of the world goes to the right spot, and modern books too, and some of the best of them, or anything that the parent himself is fond of, given in suitable quantities and with more or less explanation will be readily digested and retained, forming a sort of inward house and inhabited universe in which the child begins to find himself at home. In the decay of our general education which has followed in the wake of commercial expansion, this early parental period has been neglected. The men have not had the time for it; the women have forgotten it.

People can as a rule only give their children what they have themselves,—the musician, music, the scientist, science, the naturalist, a taste for nature. If the parents neglect their children it takes but one or two generations for the past to be lost. This has been happening in America; but we are now becoming aware of the danger. The land is full of farm hands and business men who would like to have their boys grow up into old-fashioned educated men and women. This can occasionally be done if the parent discovers his ambition during the child's early years and is willing to take the trouble. The farmer gets down his annual and the business man his old Pilgrim's Progress and makes a

personal beginning with the infant. From this point on the parent educates himself as well as the child. In all this I have in mind average conditions, normal children, sensible parents. The exceptional child shoots ahead of its parents, and soon reads and thinks for itself. It is with this exceptional child that you librarians have to do, and I am coming to you in a few moments.

The conversations and family discussions that children hear and take part in before they can read control their tastes and their future. This is their first entry into society,—the family dinner,—this is life. This experience makes an ineffaceable impression, lasting as it does for several years, and at a time when the child has no other criterion. It becomes the basis of the child's world-criticism. This long course in the domestic seminary fits the creature with prejudices, caste feelings, intolerances, strong views, habits, tastes and intellectual leanings that are not likely to change throughout his life. The Jesuits have always known this. Their doctrine is that if they can have a child during his first ten years, you may take him for the rest of his life,—he's a Jesuit.

It is during these opening years in the life of the individual that the character of any civilization is determined. No public-school system can replace this natural system which is part of animated nature; the birds and the foxes practise it. Religion and education depend upon family tradition and are transmitted at the hearthstone.

Let us turn to the brightest side of the same subject. A child during its early years, especially before it can read, accepts with avidity every interest in which the parent is interested. I am speaking in the great and large, and of the average case. A child will listen to political talk, to political economy, to astronomy, to Plato's Dialogues or Shakespeare's Plays, to natural science or to theology,—to anything that his parents are engaged on,—if they take the pains to regard him as an intelligent being and treat him as a com-

panion. The force which does the work is the spiritual authority of the parent. Nothing can replace this. The era before lessons become severe and when all things are play is the seedbed of interests. Training is another matter, and a matter I know very little about; except that I know it ought to be serious, to begin early, and that it is best done by professionals. The art of training the young has been lost in America with the rest of the fine arts; but it is undoubtedly going to be rediscovered soon. In Europe you cannot find a child of ten, nay, of eight or six whose parents are educated, who does not write a good hand. He has been trained into it, as a matter of course, as a habit, as an inherited custom, as a necessity.

With us the public libraries extend their arms to the children who come to the libraries as they come to the schools,—from homes where they have been neglected; and the libraries, like the schools, make shift to do the work of parents. I have seen those touching little benches, bookshelves and reading-rooms which our public libraries provide, and I have often reflected, as anyone must who sees the loving treatment which the youngest classes receive in our good public schools, that the state is providing parents for your children. You who work in the libraries know the matter from its practical side and you will take my suggestions as from an amateur, at least from one who has only private experience. The whole matter must be dealt with by you as a private and personal one. Let it never become professional. The children should be interested in the books that interest each of you personally, and in the best of them. More than that you cannot do for a child. I confess to a prejudice against new books written especially for children, because most of them are so bad, and because so many good children's books are in existence. No book is good enough for a child unless it is a good book, and one from which a grown person can profit. If you enjoy animal stories, give the child the story that pleases you. In this way some-

thing will pass to the child besides what the book gives him. This is the invisible part, the important part of the whole matter.

I should think that you might even set hours when you read aloud to groups of children. Indeed I feel sure that you do this. To read aloud is a powerful and a natural way of leading their interest. It gives the opportunity for that sort of comment which lends life to a subject and steers without seeming to instruct. Old-fashioned language in a book is a stumbling-block which vanishes before an appeal to the ear. Miss Edgeworth's *Parent's Assistant* with its excellent old English, its sturdy good sense and its understanding of childhood may be too hard for a child to read to himself at the start, yet, being read aloud, the language is unconsciously mastered. I have read a great many ballads from Percy's *Reliques* and the *Golden Treasury* to village school children (who are behind city children in natural quickness), and have found that after a few readings the children enjoyed them as much as anyone, and called for their favorites. I have read long bits out of the *Venerable Bede*, *White's Selborne*, *Walton's Compleat Angler*, and *Dr. John Brown's Essays*, and I have found that the children often followed the readings like a pack of hounds. Professor Norton's *Heart of Oak Series* is an excellent series of readers, because these can be put into the child's hands; but every friend to children should make his own collection and have his own classics. I made a curious discovery in reading aloud to bad boys in New York, namely, that Seton Thompson and Doctor John Brown's

dog stories held their attention better than the *Jungle Book*. This to my mind scores heavily against Kipling, though I am not sure that I can give the reason. Perhaps there is in Kipling a sophistication, or an exaggeration, or coarseness, or chauvinism which will prevent his works from taking a permanent place in literature.

If you are fond of poetry or mythology read that, and read your favorite passages, not parts scheduled by someone else. When you find a child with a special bent, subserve the bent and find out something about the subject yourself. All this is not instruction: it is companionship. You are blessedly relieved from the dead hand of state regulation which kills the school-master's life. You are not obliged to teach them anything in particular; but can give them whatever you happen to know.

And bear this in mind,—that all learning is a tree, and that the branches go back to the trunk and the trunk to the roots, and that you are never far away from the deepest and the best that has been done in literature; but are really related to it and are engaged upon thoughts that have occupied the greatest thinkers and the wisest men of history. In giving a child a taste for Shakespeare or the Bible or Milton or Longfellow or Emerson you may be lifting the intellectual horizon of some community and doing as much for truth and happiness as many a college. Your task is both the humblest and the highest, a task that sharpens the intelligence and deepens the character and keeps ever under your hand the best test of all great literature,—its effect upon the child.